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 [Title page]

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By BERNICE A. KAPLAN

Ethnic Identification in an Indian Mestizo Community

I. SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS[1]

A STUDY in a Mexican community provided opportunities for the collection of material for a statistical study of the bases of ethnic identification. In Paracho, a community in the Sierra Tarascan region of Michoacán, it appeared possible that a racial classification of the population might prove useful in the final analysis of certain anthropometric materials. The investigation was to study the effects of migration upon the physical dimensions of returned migrants in comparison with those of non-migrants and a question on the "race" of the subjects' parents was included on the data sheet. After a few records had been taken it became evident that the responses to the "race" question were such that they would be of little aid in the analysis of the anthropometric data, but that they might be of some sociological interest. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the responses to this question with a view to the insights gained into the ethnic categorization of a people by itself.

Although much has been written concerning the definition of Indian and Mestizo in Latin America, to the author's knowledge there has been no quantitative study designed to show the degree to which several possible classificatory devices are employed by the natives of a region in categorizing themselves. Furthermore, there has not been any study designed to show which segments of a population manifest changes in attitudes regarding ethnic identification.

It has frequently been said that membership in either the Indian or the Mestizo (Ladino) group in Latin America is a matter of socio-cultural rather than biological affiliation.[2] In communities where both Indio and Mestizo are locally distinguished, interaction between these groups is said to be similar to either class-like or caste-like relations.[3]

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[1] Aided by a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, to Wayne University College of Medicine for anthropological studies in Mexico.

[2] Julio de la Fuente, "Ethnic and Communal Relations" in *Heritage of Conquest*, ed. by Sol Tax (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1952), p. 77.
Julian H. Steward, "The Changing American Indian" in *Science of Man in the World Crisis*, ed. by Ralph Linton (New York, Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 262-305.
Harry Tschopik, Jr., *Highland Communities of Central Peru*, Smithsonian Institution, Institute of Social Anthropology, Publication No. 5 (Washington, 1947), pp. 11-15.

[3] Julio de la Fuente, op. cit., pp. 76 ff.

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186 In Paracho, when the question of ethnic identification was considered, it was found that cultural and linguistic rather than biological factors were indeed most important in the thinking of the citizenry. Such social distance as exists between members of the town, however, cannot be said to stem from an individual's classification as either Indio or Mestizo. [101] Paracho is located in the heart of the Tarascan Sierra and prides itself not only on being the *cabecera* (seat of government) of the *municipio* (county), but also on being a cultural and trade center for the people of surrounding towns — "The Capital of the Sierra" is the way in which its citizens describe the town. In this role Paracho has dealings with the Tarascan-speaking Indians of nearby communities and, to some extent at least, recognizes its dependence upon the good will of these people for its own continued pre-eminence in the region. Parachoans consider that their activities, behavior and interests serve as a model for the people in the smaller towns. For this reason, the interests of the residents of Paracho are directed toward the more Indian characteristics of their neighbors as well as toward the more Mestizo-like activities which many Parachoans have accepted as their standard of behavior, a type of behavior which is demanded of participants in an "urban-like" culture. There is no overt conflict between these two cultural models which coexist in the region.

556 Class distinctions within Paracho are incipient and, hence, not yet
563 formalized. In general, prestige within the community accrues to those with wealth, with nice homes, and who live better than others. Tarascans
565 (Indians) as well as Mestizos can and do achieve such status, and both groups are to be found living in all sections of the pueblo. People are not considered Mestizo because they are wealthy, nor are all the poor in Paracho called Indian. There are no recognizable Indian or Mestizo subgroups in Paracho, a fact indicative of the indifference of the citizens to such distinctions within the town limits. Wealth and poverty, local importance and insignificance may characterize siblings within the same family.

186 There is considerable indefiniteness among Parachoans concerning
563 their ethnic identity. Using those criteria accepted elsewhere in Latin America, Paracho is culturally, in the main, a Mestizo town with an urban orientation. We were told on several occasions that Paracho is a Mestizo community. However, a large proportion of the people consider themselves to be Indian, although at the same time these same people believe themselves to be "better" than those in the "small Indian places" in the vicinity. As an example of the two standards of identification one can cite the case of the local head of the Federal project to combat illiteracy through the use of written Tarascan. He is a Parachoan by birth. He is referred to by members of the community as Mestizo, yet in the same breath these people say, "Camilo is a son of the pueblo because he has so much interest in things Indian." Most of his work, however, takes place

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in communities other than Paracho, places which are culturally considerably more Indian than is Paracho.

When we inquired into the question of ethnic identification, it soon became apparent that the concept of biological race was not important in the town. Members of the populace generally regard themselves either as "sons of the pueblo" or as having come to Paracho from elsewhere. Consequently when the question was put, "To what race do your parents belong?" responses ranged from "I don't know" through "They came from here" or "They were born here" to "We are all people of Paracho" or even "All the 'Romeros' are one family, they all belong to the same race." The question was therefore worded either, "Are your parents native (*natural*), Mestizo or what?" or, "Are your parents Indians, Spanish (*de razon*) or what?" and — usually in one of these two forms — the question was put to 256 people.[4] It was our purpose to standardize the question, to secure comparable results, and yet to leave the way open for free elaboration.

The field team consisted of a physical anthropologist, the able field assistant, Prof. Pablo Valesquez G., who conducted the interviews connected with the mensurational part of the study, and the social anthropologist. The responses to the question were noted as heard, together with such supplementary explanations as the informants occasionally proffered. This record was kept independently of that made by the field assistant and both have been utilized.

Two hundred and eighty-nine of the parents were reported as being Indian and 167 as being Mestizo. Although almost all persons were able and willing to make the judgment it did not always carry much conviction and one got the impression that emotional involvement was usually totally lacking.

The series may be further analysed to note the frequency with which children report similarities or differences in ethnic identification between parents. In the great preponderance of instances children reported both parents to be of the same ethnic background, either both Mestizo or both Indian. This regularity of parallel responses is at least in part derived from the nature of the formal interview, where it is easier to give the same answer to the same question about two individuals than it is to consider the question twice. It is interesting, however, to note that where "mixed" parentage was mentioned, a significantly larger number of respondents reported their fathers as Mestizos and their mothers as Indian than did the reverse. The more frequent mention of Indian mothers may represent an overt expression of a realization that the fathers — or rather, the men in general — are the ones who enter into the Mestizo-like activities (com-

[4] In the tabulations which follow "Indian" includes responses recorded as *Indio, Indigena, Natural*, and Tarascan; "Mestizo" includes responses recorded as *Mesclado, Cruzado, de razon, Mestizo*, half and half, *revueltas*, and white.

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mercial transactions and specialized production for sale outside the region), whereas the women, mostly sequestered in their homes, remain conservative, and consequently more "Indian-like." The responses may, however, represent a real sex differential, i.e., more women than men native to the community — with men from elsewhere marrying into the community. In 201 matings where data on the birthplace of both spouses were available, both were from Paracho in 72.6 per cent of cases, 10 per cent of the husbands were from elsewhere, 8.5 per cent of the wives were from other communities, and in 9 per cent of cases both were born elsewhere. Slightly more men than women, therefore, do marry into the community, but this difference is not large enough to explain the sex difference in ethnic attribution.

TABLE 1

"RACE" OF FATHER AND "RACE" OF MOTHER

Mothers reported as	Fathers reported as Indian	Fathers reported as Mestizo	Total
Indian	130	33	163
Mestiza	16	61	77
Total	146	94	240[5]

χ^2 with one degree of freedom: 300.28 $P < 0.0001$

Whereas sex of the parents does influence the responses, sex of the respondents seems to have virtually no effect. Females reported 66.9 per cent of 139 parents to be Indian, whereas males reported 63.5 per cent of 386 parents to be Indian. The difference is not statistically significant.

When the data taken from the record sheets are compiled in terms of the age of the respondent (see Table 2) another tendency may be noted. Both relatively and absolutely more Indian parents are reported by older respondents. Those 40 years old or less reported 48 per cent of fathers and 54 per cent of mothers to be Indian, in contrast to 73 per cent and 76 per cent respectively by individuals who were 41 years old or over. Conversely, of course, the percentage of Mestizo parents is approximately the same as that of Indian parents through the 40 year age group, but thereafter the proportions change markedly and membership in the Mestizo group is claimed for far fewer parents.

These age trends may be interpreted in several ways. First, the younger informants, in ascribing to their parents membership in one or the other ethnic group, may reflect an awareness that their current way of life is less Indian than it is Mestizo, and may extend this to their parents. With more education and a wider outlook one would expect to find among youth a greater bias toward being counted as belonging to a larger ethnic entity than that of the region, and to the ethnic group with a somewhat higher education — the Mestizo in both instances. On the other hand, the marked

[5] Some variation in total number from table to table results from the fact that not all respondents gave information on all points. Furthermore, where data on parents rather than on respondents are tabulated information from only one sibling interviewed is included.

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increase in reported Indian parents by the older group may also reflect awareness of the social changes which have been occurring over the decades, and the heavy incidence of Indian parents reported may merely be a reflection of the fact that "things were not always thus." One elderly man, commenting on the changes which he had seen in Paracho since his youth, said, "In that time the people spoke only Tarascan, and the race was *naturalito*, all *Indios* here. Since the burning of the town (in 1917 during the 1910-1920 Revolution) the people speak only Castilian."

TABLE 2

AGE OF RESPONDENT AND REPORTED RACE OF PARENTS

Age of Informant	Fathers		Mothers	
	Indian	Mestizo	Indian	Mestiza
Under 20	5	5	6	4
21-30	20	18	18	20
31-40	28	32	33	27
41-50	36	18	37	17
51-60	30	10	34	6
61 and over	22	4	20	6
Total	141	87	148	80

These explanations are admittedly not biological. Indeed, it can be demonstrated empirically that to the extent to which the question aroused any interest at all, the residents of Paracho are not concerned with genetic (racial) explanations. Of thirty-seven explanations as to why their parents are considered to be Indian the following reasons were given: the parents were "from here in Paracho" in thirteen instances; they were "born in Paracho" in nine instances; they were said to have been born "in an Indian place" in nine instances; they were described as descended (in the male line) from those who had come to Paracho from Paracho Viejo in the 16th century in five instances. The eight other reasons included the following: "Because in 1901 the people were more *Natural* and today they are more civilized"; "parent is *Indigena*, but on the basis of color is with the French or the Spanish"; "All of us are pure people, Indians — we are of this population"; "In that time there were no mixtures"; "More Indian than *de razon*, like it still is, *Natural*, no?" and finally, "Indian, the same as the rest of us."

From the twenty-one explanations concerning Mestizo parents the following tabulation results. In seven instances the parent concerned was said to have been born elsewhere. In four instances the parents are described as Mestizo because they do not, or did not, speak Tarascan. In two cases the parents were "more white." In two responses they were "like ourselves" (i.e., the speakers). And in one instance the parents were considered to be Mestizo because they were born in Paracho. Of the miscellaneous reasons the following are illustrative: ". . . my father is a little Spanish, the Indians don't have a beard." "They were *de razon*, but from the *ranchos*." One man said he did not know how to answer as his parents

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spoke both Tarascan and Spanish; his wife told him that his father was *de razon* and he said, "Well, my mother was this also." The other 198 individuals in the sample did not consider that any elaboration other than the answer to the question was necessary — another indication of the relative unimportance of the distinction in the town.

Through all of these explanations it can be seen that place of birth is apparently primary in determining the ethnic group with which one will later (if ever) be identified, with the ability to speak the Tarascan language second in importance. There is evidence that Tarascan as the idiom of the community was no longer in favor even several generations ago. Not only is the use of Tarascan in Paracho limited today to members of the oldest generation, but several people showed their dislike for the language and implied that their parents did not teach it to them, or did so only inadequately. Children today are not learning Tarascan, and this tie with Indian culture is rapidly disappearing.

The place of birth of the parents may be correlated with ethnic origin to determine to what extent the ethnic composition of the community depends on birthplace. The data indicate that either more Mestizos are coming into Paracho from the outside, or that more of the people who have come to Paracho from elsewhere are considered to be Mestizos. In most instances the places whence the parents had emigrated were small Sierra Tarascan villages and towns, considered by Parachoans to be "Indian places." In moving to the larger center these individuals had identified themselves (or had been identified by their children) with the more urban, Mestizo, way of life. Among parents born outside Paracho 54.5 per cent of mothers are classed as Mestiza and 58.0 per cent of fathers are reported as Mestizo.

TABLE 3

"RACE" OF FATHER AND MOTHER ACCORDING TO PLACE OF BIRTH [6]

Reported as:	Father born		Mother born	
	Paracho	*elsewhere*	*Paracho*	*elsewhere*
Indian	120	26	143	25
Mestizo	53	36	49	30
Total	173	62	192	55
	χ^2 with one degree of freedom: 14.54		χ^2 with one degree of freedom: 16.33	
	$P<0.0002$		$P<0.0001$	

Although a majority of parents born elsewhere are described as Mestizo, others are called Indian. The stereotype of the Indian (not native to Paracho) held by the local citizenry is similar to that reported by other investigators in Mexico.[7] The Indians in near-by communities have the

[6] Parents born in forty-six communities other than Paracho are represented in the total sample.

[7] George Foster, *Empire's Children, The People of Tzintzuntzan*, Smithsonian Institute of Social Anthropology, Publication No. 6. (Washington, 1948), p. 33.
Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlan Restudied* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1951), pp. 53-54.
Robert Redfield, *Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 75.

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reputation of being ignorant, backward, and mean. We were told that especially when drunk such Indians "get real mean." One qualification of a "real" Indian is a quick trigger finger, for as one man said, "My *compadre* from Arantepáquaro is real Indian . . . and he killed three fellows one time. And another in Aranza he killed eleven cousins in a fight over lands."

In recent years there has been an influx to Paracho from towns which also have both Mestizo and Indian elements defined in their population. Some of those interviewed came from Charapan, where a local political upheaval had stimulated emigration, others came from villages made uninhabitable by the eruption of Parícutin Volcano. By no means all parents reported to be Mestizos are from families which have come to Paracho in the last generation, however. On the whole, the relationship between the reported Mestizos and Indians is little altered when the "outsiders" are pooled with the locally-born citizens.

In twenty-two instances it was possible to compare the children's responses with those of their parents. In twelve of these instances the child's categorization of his parent was identical with the parent's categorization of his parents — that is, where the child said his father was *de razon*, the father in turn said that his parents were *de razon*. In five instances there was a complete shift in identification between one generation and the next; in five of these five instances children regarded their parents as Mestizo while the parents regarded *their* parents as Indian. In an additional four instances there was a partial change: for example, the child reported a parent as Mestizo, while the parent concerned reported his father to have been Mestizo and his mother to have been Indian.

It is clear from these comparisons that the responses reflect a variable social attitude rather than any commonly perceivable reality. There is nothing to indicate any presence of the notion that one Indian ancestor automatically makes the possessor Indian (or that one Spanish ancestor makes him Mestizo). Where the criteria for ethnic identification are cultural rather than biological such a notion would not be expected.

It may be said that latent attitudes concerning ethnic differences within the community exist, and the answers to a question concerning these differences are suggestive of the criteria upon which the identifications are based. Such insights are helpful in understanding some of the dynamics involved in social as well as spatial mobility.

The most salient feature, from our point of view, is the lack of any intense feeling concerning ethnic identification. It is not easy for the outside observer to set up any demonstrably valid criteria by which to judge the ethnic make-up of the Paracho community. The fact that some 85 per cent of the people are interrelated, at least by marriages, would

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186 seem to indicate that the community, largely within itself, constitutes a breeding population. Relatively few outsiders come in. Furthermore, the observer's impression is that the question of ethnic origin was not one vital to relations between members of the community. Recognition is given to individuals of varying status, but no evident biological differences were observed between individuals of the highest and the lowest status. 184 So far as participation in the ulture is concerned, both extremes share the same understandings and values, and those at the lowest extreme are 186 prevented from fully participating only by economic handicaps.

It is recognized by members of the community that some of their activities are akin to those of the city dweller, and pride is taken in these "modernizations." In some of their traditions, however, the ties are with the more isolated Indian communities. There is no apology for what is more Indian in Paracho although informants did comment on the backwardness of some of the "small Indian places." It can be said in general, however, that the dichotomy between Mestizo and Indian reported as extant in other Latin American communities does not exist in Paracho; there is neither stigma attached to being Indian nor prestige conferred for being Mestizo. The town is culturally homogeneous, and the modifications in the way of life are recognized as potentially applying to all within the community rather than characterizing any particular segment of the population. The distinctions made by the respondents concerning the ethnic origin of their parents therefore may be taken to indicate the children's estimation of their parents' participation in the overall cultural mestization of the town.

186 *Summary*: — First, in the community studied, asking about "race" would not be expected to be useful in distinguishing physical types or subgroups within the population because the people do not distinguish each other in such biological terms. Second, it is significant that where children say that their parents are of different ethnic origin more children regard their fathers as Mestizos, their mothers as Indians. Third, younger segments of the population report approximately similar numbers of Mestizo and Indian parents, while older respondents consistently report more parents to be Indian than Mestizo. Fourth, informants' explanations for this or that ethnic categorization are largely based upon birthplace, with linguistic criteria second in importance. Fifth, in considering place of birth and "race" of parents a slight tendency exists to report more parents among individuals who were not native to Paracho to be Mestizo than for Paracho-born parents. Finally, the impression of homogeneity within the community lends additional support to the conclusion that ethnic identification in Paracho is based upon cultural considerations.